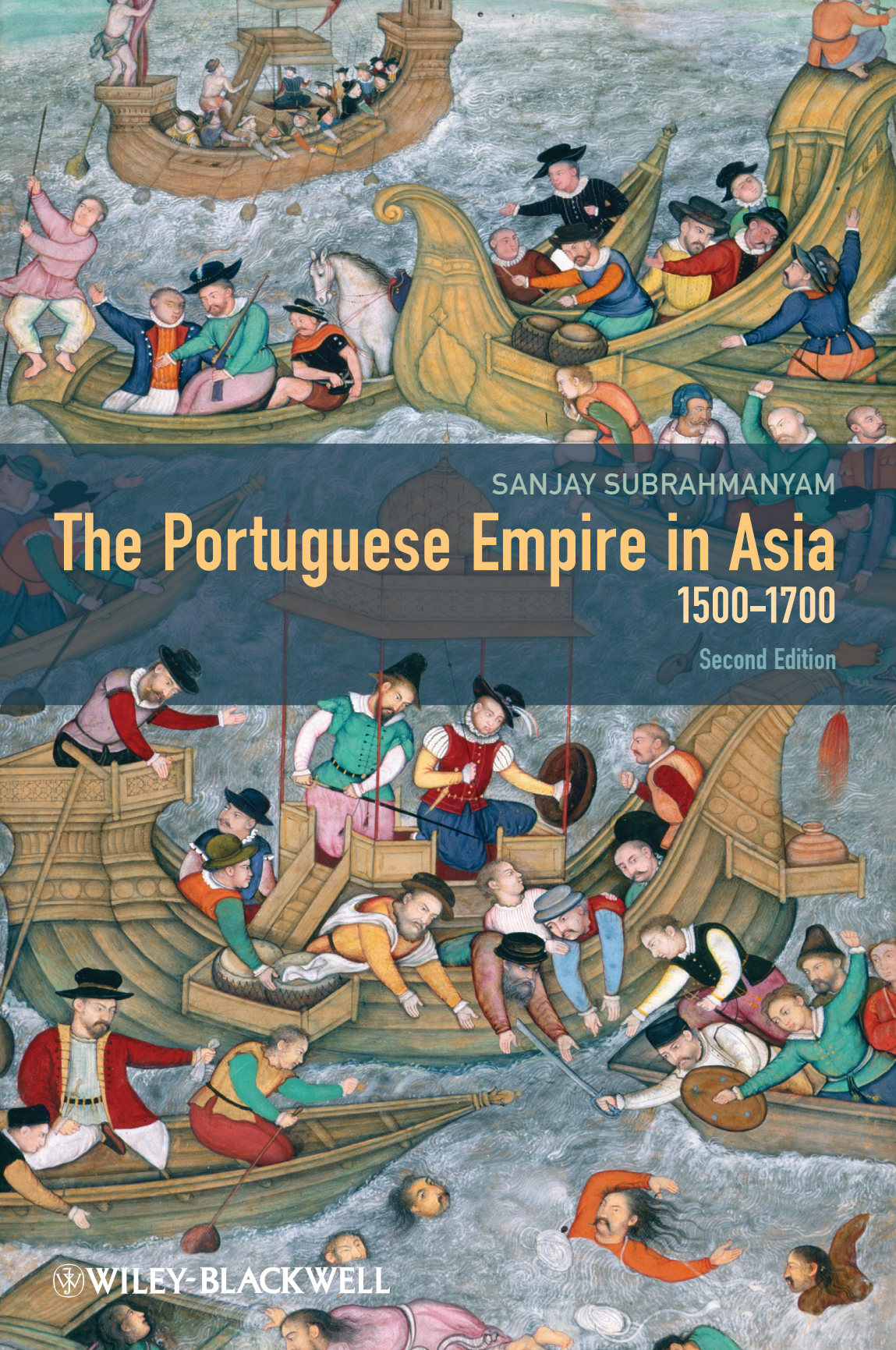

SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM

The Portuguese Empire in Asia

1500–1700

Second Edition

WILEY-BLACKWELL

The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700

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A Political and Economic History

Second Edition

Sanjay Subrahmanyam

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For Maria Augusta and Arlindo,
my favorite *arrenegados*

Contents

Abbreviations

ACE	*Assentos do Conselho do Estado*, ed. P. S. S. Pissurlencar
AHU	Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon
ANTT	Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon
APO	*Archivo Portuguez-Oriental*, ed. J. H. da Cunha Rivara
BFUP	*Boletim da Filmoteca Ultramarina Portuguesa*
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
BNL	Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Lisbon
BPADE	Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Distrital, Évora
CAA	*Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, eds. R. A. de Bulhão Pato and H. Lopes de Mendonça
CC	Corpo Cronológico
CNCDP	Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses
CSL	Colecção de São Lourenço
DRI	Documentos Remetidos da Índia (published and unpublished)
HAG	Historical Archives, Panaji, Goa
IOLR	India Office Library and Records, British Library, London
NAH	Nationaal Archief, The Hague
VOC	Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie

Maps

Tables

Acknowledgments

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Preface to the Second Edition

How time passes! Nearly two decades have elapsed since the first edition of this book was completed in Delhi in 1991-2. In the years that have gone by, much of importance has appeared on the Portuguese in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Asia. This work has largely been in English, French, and Portuguese, occasionally in other languages. It has taken the form of monographs, essays, and collective volumes, as well as works of synthesis by one or several authors. Most of these writers are (for better or worse) personally known to me, as the world of Portuguese Asian historiography is still a small one. I have followed this growing body of work with interest, and also sometimes contributed to it, in the form of both essays and monographs.

Nevertheless, it appears to be still the case that this book – though the work of a young scholar who was in 1992 barely thirty – has not been entirely overtaken in either its thrust or overall contribution by the writings that have come since. To be sure, there are some matters of detail that have needed correction or elaboration, and the original work did (alas) contain a certain number of errors of fact. Where possible, I have indeed corrected them, and I thank those who pointed them out in the many reviews that were published of this book between 1993 and 1995.

A small minority of reviewers has had fundamental problems with the book, and taken a radical polemical stance against it. I cannot reply to them either here or in the body of the book itself, which is after all a work of synthesis and schematization – not of polemic. I have done so elsewhere when it seemed appropriate. In particular, I believe the sad episodes of misinformation in Portugal around the "Vasco da Gama commemoration" in 1997-8 once more underlined the need for a book such as this one. Further, to those friendly critics who have

suggested that this book could now be rewritten as much as a cultural history as a "political and economic" one, I must point to the structural difficulties such changes would entail. Perhaps I will return to that challenge one day. For now, I have chosen to update the work where I felt it to be truly necessary rather than undertaking the enterprise of rewriting it from scratch, or adding every relevant bibliographical item from the past two decades (even from my own writings). The changes the reader will find here are thus limited in relation to the first edition, and for now I will direct the reader desirous of more reference materials to my own essay, Subrahmanyam (2007), and the broad survey by Disney (2009).

My thanks in particular to my younger friends and colleagues, who have responded positively and critically to this book. As they will know already, or may discover in time, the work of any historian is always provisional, and this work is no exception. Thanks anyway to Giancarlo Casale, Jorge Flores, Giuseppe Marcocci, Ângela Barreto Xavier, and several other friends and colleagues.

Finally, a special word of thanks to Tessa Harvey and Wiley-Blackwell for agreeing to give this book a new lease of life. It has a special place in my sentiments, and I am really quite pleased to see it back in print. The first edition of this book carried no dedication. That was an oversight, and this edition carries a proper dedication to two friends whom I have known from at least 1985, at least half my life now. It is in affectionate recollection of all the times – often very amusing – we have spent together.

Los Angeles
August 2011

Preface to the First Edition

Writing the preface of a book is often a greater pleasure than writing the book itself, since discharging debts is usually more pleasurable than incurring them. The germ of this book emerged in the summer of 1988, while I was giving seminars and teaching in Paris and Lisbon. It was stimulated by conversations with friends in both places, and particularly by the demands made on me by classes of the Mestrado in the History of Portuguese Expansion at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. For the opportunity to teach in Lisbon, I thank Artur Teodoro de Matos and Luís Filipe Thomaz. The stimulating ideas of the latter – surely the leading Portuguese historian today of the *Estado da Índia* – are directly reflected here, and breathed life into the project; I also thank him for his comments and suggestions on a first draft. The perspective of the foreign visitor to Portugal often tends to be excessively Lisbon-centered; a visit to Braga and the "other" Portugal with Maria Augusta Lima Cruz and Arlindo Fagundes was of great utility in putting Portugal in perspective, besides being a pleasure in itself. I hope they will all forgive the presumptuous character of this book.

In the autumn of 1988, when the outline of this book was defined at Cambridge, Chris and Susan Bayly, who were there, and Kenneth McPherson, who was visiting London, played the role of sounding boards. Geoffrey Parker, generous as ever with his time as a correspondent, also helped give the idea shape, and a single, useful afternoon with John Elliott helped clarify matters Iberian. Seminar audiences in Cambridge and Leiden responded positively to an early draft outline (which has now appeared as a joint essay with Luís Filipe Thomaz in James Tracy, ed., *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires,* Cambridge/New York, 1991), and helped sustain my confidence in the project.

As an economic historian based in India, I had tended to view the Portuguese materials in perhaps too limited and functional a fashion in my earlier work (e.g. Subrahmanyam 1990a). This book therefore represents a shift in perspective, but it was not my intention to abandon Asian history in the process. At the same time, this is a work of synthesis, more concerned with the whole than the parts; it is not a book on the nitty-gritty of the social, political, and economic history of Goa, or Macau, Timor, Mozambique, or of the other Portuguese possessions in Asia. These are subjects deserving of far more detailed treatment than can be afforded in a book of this size and nature. Thus, to the reader who finds lacunae, an inadequate treatment of this or that aspect (be it Franciscan ideology, household slavery or price history, to cite three random examples), I can only offer my apologies and point to the bibliography where possible (cf. Marcocci 2011).

The book itself was finished in far more trying circumstances than those in which it began. Turmoil-ridden Delhi in 1990–1 has not been the most congenial of academic or social atmospheres. But conversations with friends, especially Muzaffar Alam and Sunil Kumar, have been a consolation; both of them have partly read and made helpful comments on the manuscript, as have G. Balachandran, Kenneth McPherson, and Gail Alterman. To all of them my thanks, and also especially to Jaivir Singh, who has been a patient reader of half-finished drafts, delighting in particular in the forays into Japanese history.

As an attempt at synthesis, this book naturally depends more than monographs do on the work of colleagues. I should mention the following persons in particular: Jean Aubin, Geneviève Bouchon, João Paulo Costa, Teotónio R. De Souza, Anthony Disney, Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, Jorge Manuel Flores, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Salih Özbaran, Michael Pearson, George B. Souza, Niels Steensgaard, Luís Filipe Thomaz, and John Wills. One need hardly add that without the work of three pioneers – Charles Boxer, Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, and A. H. de Oliveira Marques – a work like this would have been impossible. The work of the Goan archivist and historian, the late P.S.S. Pissurlencar, has also been extremely useful as a point of reference.

Finally, a word of appreciation for Longman for the confidence reposed in an experiment in historical writing, and for patiently waiting for a delayed manuscript. I also thank them for their wisdom in having the manuscript read by Peter Marshall at the draft stage, even as I thank him for his encouraging comments. I hope the end-product has been made more "user-friendly" by my response to them.

New Delhi
May 1992

Introduction

The Mythical Faces of Portuguese Asia

Five hundred long years have passed since the Portuguese conquests of Goa (1510) and Melaka (1511). And yet it seems that the dust has just about settled now on Portuguese colonialism. It was less than forty years ago, in the aftermath of the "Carnation Revolution" – referred to by many Portuguese simply as *vinte e cinco de abril* (or April 25), with the year, 1974, being implicitly understood – that the Portuguese finally and somewhat reluctantly left their colonial possessions in Africa. In Southeast Asia, their last outpost, East Timor, was wrested from them forcibly by the Indonesian Republic, and has only recently regained independence; only Macau remained to them until the end of the twentieth century from an empire over which the sun once practically never set. Even today, many Portuguese, Asians and Africans remain deeply divided over how to understand and interpret the imperial edifice that the Portuguese created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; indeed, doubts even are raised on whether the Portuguese truly had an empire in any meaningful sense in that period. Since Portuguese expansion is intimately tied to Portuguese nationalism and collective identity – with the two most celebrated poets of the Lusitanian pantheon, the author of the *Lusíadas,* Luís Vaz de Camões (1524–80), and the "modernist" author of *Mensagem,* Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), both having held strong views on the subject – it is very difficult indeed to separate myth from history, and many do not even wish to try. Portuguese schoolchildren over many generations learnt to memorize these lines that begin Camões's great

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work, and which I render here in my own manner, as so many earlier translators have done.

> The arms and the heroes of renown,
> who from the western Lusitanian beach,
> through seas never before known,
> passed even beyond Taprobane's reach,
> through the perils and hardy wars they found,
> more than what human force could teach,
> and amidst those far-off folk they created,
> a New Kingdom, perfectly sublimated.

In writing this book, which is in the form of a long synthetic, interpretative, and at times speculative essay in several chapters rather than an encyclopaedic survey, my desire is certainly not to fight the colonial wars all over again, or even to ask whether indeed that "New Kingdom" was quite so sublime. Nor is this book a foray into the myriad and complex dimensions of the cultural interaction between the Portuguese and Asia. Instead, the book is fundamentally a political and economic history, which will attempt to locate the Portuguese presence between the Cape of Good Hope and Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on two intersecting planes. On the one hand, the Portuguese will be placed firmly in the Asian and East African contexts; at the same time, they will be located in the European (and more specifically Iberian) context. This exercise, which would be rather dull under the rules of Euclidean geometry (where the intersection of the two planes would leave us with only a straight line!), hopefully has more potential in the rather more flexible discipline of history: historians of imperialism will doubtless recognize here echoes of the well-known debate on "Euro-centric" and "Ex-centric" explanations for nineteenth-century European imperial expansion (Bayly 1989). And indeed, the present work is conceived as a contribution to the larger debate on the nature of European empire-building in the early modern period. It will therefore attempt to grapple not merely with the issues mentioned above, but with the rather more thorny question of the extent of continuity and discontinuity between Portuguese, and later Dutch and English, expansion in Asia.

But how after all does one write such a history? On what sources can the historian who wishes to write a "balanced account" rely? For the most part, we must fall back willy-nilly on the Portuguese sources themselves, but these are surely not the only materials available to us. It is also true that even the corpus of Portuguese documentation does not speak to us with a single voice. Differences exist depending on the nature of the source (whether it is a letter, an account-book or a chronicle), on the social status of the writer (for even chroniclers can

afford us vastly different visions depending on the social group to which they pertained), and the time of the writing (for the early sixteenth century scarcely appeared so glorious to Portuguese of the 1540s as it did to those writing in the 1620s). In the case of writers belonging to the missionary orders, much depends on the nature of the order itself – for the Jesuit view of an event could be rather different from that of an Augustinian or Franciscan.

Besides the Portuguese sources, one also has other materials, in the form of travel-accounts by other Europeans like the Dutchman Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's famous late sixteenth-century *Itinerario* (Tiele and Burnell 1885), later trading Company papers from the seventeenth century, and the memoirs and correspondence of Italian and German merchants who were resident in Portuguese Asia. Also, one has Asian and African materials, whether in written form (as chronicles, travelogues and letters), or preserved as oral traditions (Subrahmanyam 2005a: 17-44). This last set of materials had for long years largely been disregarded by historians for several reasons. First, they are so scattered and diverse, and call for such extensive linguistic skills, that they remain only partially tapped. But second, and more importantly, there continues to be a widespread notion that these materials are unreliable, because they envelop the Portuguese in a cloud of myth, and fail basic tests, in particular of chronological accuracy. At best, it is therefore argued, they can be used to show that the Portuguese were unimportant in Asia (since many Asian sources largely ignore them) or that the Asians were too self-absorbed and too culturally involuted to need to bother with the newcomers.

But this last was not always true. Let us consider the example of an untitled Malay text from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, describing the Portuguese arrival at the great Southeast Asian port-city of Melaka, near the tip of the Malay peninsula, and encompassing their seizure of it, how they fortified it and made it a center of their own trade, and how they were eventually expelled from it. It is, therefore, a complete cycle of rise, prosperity and fall of which we read, self-contained and with its own internal logic. It runs as follows.

> This is a history from long, long ago: The Franks arrive in the land of Melaka.
>
> Those who know the history tell us that there were, so it is said, ten Portuguese ships which came from Manila to trade in the country of Melaka. In that time, the king was the Sultan Ahmad Syah. In that epoch, the country of Melaka was very active in trade, and prosperous, and its government was in good order. But as time passed, the Portuguese ships arrive in the country of Melaka. Now in that time the fortifications of the city of Melaka were made of palm-tree trunks.
>
> Then the captain of the ship arrives to trade, with various other ships' captains, and they bring for the King Sultan Ahmad Syah a present of gold, reals, cloth, and chains from Manila; and the Sultan was most content with the Portuguese captain.

And so, at the end of a little time, whatever the captains desired was done by the Sultan Ahmad Syah. Many times did the ministers (*bendahara* and *temenggong*) say respectfully:

> Your Highness, My Lord, should not be too trusting with these white people, because in the modest opinion of all your old servants, it is not good that My Lord protects these recent arrivals.

And then the Sultan Ahmad Syah spoke:

> *Bendahara,* my uncle, and noble *temenggong,* I do not see how these white people can cause the loss of our land!

After this, the *bendahara* and *temenggong* still did not feel easy inside, and observed respectfully to the King:

> As for these white people, no good will come of them for Your Highness and Lordship . . .

However, the *bendahara* and *temenggong* could achieve nothing more. It was then that the captains of the ships began to give out gold chains from Manila to various notables in the country of Melaka. And all of the natives of Melaka became most grateful to the captains of the Portuguese ships. Only the *bendahara* and *temenggong* were not content.

The Portuguese ships remained then in Melaka, trading for a space of forty days, more or less. And the Portuguese came once again on land to offer *reales* in boxes and boxes, and gold and many lovely cloths, which they offered to His Highness Sultan Ahmad Syah. And the Sultan Ahmad Syah was content.

Once more then the Sultan Ahmad Syah spoke to the Portuguese captain:

> What more is it that these friends of ours want of us, that they bring us such a lovely gift?

Then all the captains of the ships said to him:

> We want but one thing of our good friend; that is if our good friend wishes to remain friendly with us, white people.

At which the Sultan Ahmad Syah replied to them:

> Say it then for we permit it! If it is anything that we have, we will most certainly satisfy the desire of our friends!

Then the captains of the ships said:

> We would like to ask for a piece of land, the size of the dried skin of an animal.

And the King spoke:

> Do not be sad, friends of ours: take the land that pleases you; and if it is of such size, keep the land.

Then the Portuguese captain was quite content. And at once the Portuguese come on land, bringing hoes to dig, bricks and lime. And they go to fetch that hide, made a cord from it, and with it measure out a square. And they make an extremely large building, fortified, and they at the same time make openings for cannon. And all the people of Melaka ask:

> But what openings are these?

And the Portuguese responded:

> These are the openings that white people use as windows.

And the people of Melaka kept silent. Then, when the people were silent, on various occasions the *bendahara* and *temenggong* observed respectfully to the King:

> My Lord! Do not permit these white people to make a great house!

And the King spoke:

> In no way can these white people cause ruin to our land! I see very well that the white men are not many; and if their designs are evil, we will observe their behavior; and if needed send in the amok.

After this the *bendahara* and *temenggong* were still not content in their hearts, because both were wise men. And the behavior of the Portuguese was thus: at night, they unloaded cannon from their ships, and muskets hidden in boxes, saying that there was cloth inside them: such was the behavior of the Portuguese to mislead the people of Melaka. And they did it so that the people of Melaka did not understand. Then, time having passed, the house of stone was complete and all their arms were ready. And more or less at midnight, when the people were all sleeping, then it was that the Franks bombarded the city of Melaka, and all the houses of the Melaka people were in ruins as was the fort made of palm trees.

After this, under the bombardment of the Franks, at the midnight hour, thus it is that the King Ahmad Syah with all the people flees without knowing where, without having a chance to resist. And the Franks take Melaka. The Sultan Ahmad Syah flees to Muar; and from Muar, not long thereafter, shifts to Johor, to build a city; and from Johor moves again to Bintang. Such is the history of the Franks who snatched the city of Melaka from the hands of the Sultan Ahmad Syah once upon a time.

The history tells how the Franks remained in the city of Melaka for a duration of three months of time. Then the Franks sent a letter to their principal city, which is called Goa, saying that Melaka had been taken by the Franks. Then as soon as the great king of the Franks heard the news that Melaka was taken, he became very content. And when some time had passed, two months after the letter had reached his hands, their great king responded with a letter saying that they should erect a great fort of granite inside the city of Melaka; as for the form of this fortress, that it should be exactly like that of the great city that is called Goa. And thus the Portuguese made the fortress of Melaka equal to that of the country of Goa.

The history tells us then that when the letter of the King of Goa arrived in Melaka, the Portuguese who were there in the city sent the people of Melaka who remained to fetch granite. For the first time they went to fetch granite to make the fortress of Melaka, to Kuala Langai, and to Pulo Upeh, and to Bato Barus, and to Pulo Java, and to Tluk Emas, and to Pisau Peringgi, and to the island of Birds and to the backlands of Melaka. It was thus that the Melaka people went to fetch granite. As for its price: for a hundred pieces of granite, the Portuguese paid thirty *patacas*, for a hundred of the large, and twenty for a hundred small ones; at this time, hens were purchased by the Portuguese for one new coin each; and lime at this time was fifteen *patacas* the *koyang.* And the laborers dug on the hill at a *rupia* a day.

As for the fortification of the city of Melaka, it took, so they say, thirty-six years, three months and fourteen days. And the Portuguese remained in Melaka thereafter, so it is estimated, for another six years and a month. Such was the case of the Franks who remained in Melaka. And during the time that the Portuguese remained in Melaka, the city was most busy, and many were the merchants who came to trade in the port. So tells the history of long, long ago.

After this, it tells that a Dutch ship came to trade in Melaka. The name of the ship was *Aftar Lindir* and the name of its captain Inybir. It was this man who came to Melaka to trade; and he then saw Melaka in its beauty, with its fortress and its moat. And that Dutch ship traded in Melaka for fifteen days; and then set sail for its Europe.

Then, some time having passed, the Dutch ship arrived in its principal city; and the captain of the ship gave news to his great king concerning Melaka, which had active trade, of its fort and of its lovely moat. After which the great king of Europe says:

If such are the tidings, it will be good to have Melaka attacked.

And when time had passed, behold the great king of Europe sends twenty-five ships to go and attack Melaka. And the twenty-five ships make themselves ready, and are all equipped with soldiers. And behold those that sail in the direction of the city of Banten of Java. There was at the time in the city of Banten of Java a factory of the Dutch Company. Then those twenty-five ships arrived in Banten of Java, saying that they wished to go and attack Melaka. Now at this time in Banten there were also two Dutch ships and a galliot; and at once all of them filled their holds with all sorts of victuals; and without delay they set sail in the direction of Melaka.

So, once the ships had arrived at the bar of Melaka, the Dutch immediately sent the Portuguese a letter, saying they should prepare themselves, for next day at noon they would attack.

And the Portuguese replied:

> As you wish! We are ready!

Then, on the next day, the Dutch attack, and they fight for about two months. But Melaka does not surrender at all. Then all the Dutch set sail in the direction of Banten. And after a few days all those ships arrive in the city of Banten and remain anchored there, with the intention of returning again to Europe.

All the Dutch feel ashamed, in front of the important people who had come in the ships. Then, once time had passed, the important people who had come in the ships sat down to discuss, deliberating with one another whether to attack anew.

Then, for the second time, the Dutch attack: Melaka does not yield.

The Dutch send letters to Johor, to ally themselves with the Sultan of Johor to attack the city of Melaka. And the King of Johor was content; and from then on, the Dutch and the King of Johor had an oath of alliance: Dutch and Malays became one only in order to go and attack Melaka. This was the agreement between the Dutch and the King of Johor: if they took Melaka, then the city and artillery would revert to Holland; and all the riches would be divided in two parts, one part for the Dutch, and the other part for the people from Johor. And this agreement was solemnized.

Then the people from Johor and the ships of the Dutch set sail in the direction of Melaka: and for some fifteen days they fight with the Franks. Many of the Franks died, but many of the Malays and Dutch died too.

After this the Malays thought to themselves:

> Even if we fight white people of this sort for a whole year, they will not surrender!

On this account it was agreed amongst all the good Malays that the best thing would be to send fifty people into the place, who would go amok inside there.

The Malays fixed the time for the 21st of the month, at the beginning of the dawn oration. And the Malays entered the place, and made themselves amok. And the

> Franks were exterminated, some fleeing to the backlands of Melaka; they did not know where to go, those Portuguese!
>
> And all the Malays found in Melaka an enormous prize. Then, as had been in the agreement between the Dutch and the people of Melaka, so it was, as promised, that all the riches obtained were exactly divided.
>
> Those from Johor returned then to their land of Johor, and the Dutch established themselves, keeping for themselves the land of Melaka. Since then, the Dutch and the Malays of Johor have remained on good terms, until today.
>
> This is what the history tells us of times long ago. As for this narration, it is composed by the Datu Bendahara of the King, His Majesty.
>
> (Thomaz 1986b; 1987)

What does one make of a text such as this? At the most mundane level, it is clear that it has many of the "facts of the matter" quite wrong: the Portuguese did not arrive in Melaka from Manila; the "great king" of the Portuguese resided not in Goa but in Portugal; the manner in which the city was taken in 1511 was not as is described here (if most other texts are to be believed), the Portuguese remained in Melaka for some one hundred and thirty years and not a mere forty-odd as is implied here, and so on. And so might one concur with the Portuguese Orientalist David Lopes, who wrote in 1899 that Asian sources in fact hold little of importance for the history of the Portuguese in Asia (Lopes 1899: xc–xci)?

Let us begin by noting that not all Asian texts fall within the same genre, and nor indeed do all Portuguese texts of the period. The reader of the famous *Peregrinação* of the sixteenth-century Portuguese traveler Fernão Mendes Pinto may find himself in a China or Japan where the natives at times converse in Malay, and where other rather improbable events take place (Pinto 1983; 1989). This makes the *Peregrinação* a rather different sort of text from, say, the chronicler João de Barros's solemn work *Da Ásia* (Barros 1973); it does not render it valueless though. Similarly, Luís de Camões's epic poem, the *Lusíadas*, is scarcely to be treated as an historical source of the same type as the governor Afonso de Albuquerque's letters to his sovereign. In the case of sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Asian sources one must similarly make a distinction: the *Kitab-i Bahriye* of the Turkish admiral Piri Reis (1474–1554) cannot be equated to the Malay text glossed at length above, and nor can it be equated to a text like the Chinese *Yuejian Bian* (1601) of Wang Linxiang, which contains a quite elaborate discussion of Ming policy-making in respect of the European presence off Chinese shores (Reis 1988; Blussé 1988).

The utility of these sources can be approached from two perspectives. First, they often contain information of a sort wholly unavailable in contemporary Portuguese documentation: the analysis of the *Yuejian Bian* shows, for example, that Chinese officialdom in the late sixteenth century included men who – contrary

to conventional wisdom – had every desire to build contacts with foreigners, and that this influenced their policy decisions in respect of trade concessions. With the very best of will, the historian could never have arrived at this fact on the basis of Portuguese or Dutch sources, which very rarely discuss the issue of the Chinese "official mind" at all (Blussé 1988). This is a relatively trivial instance, but many other examples can be brought out to show how Asian sources often give us useful "facts" where the European materials are silent. But going beyond this, there is also the issue of the *perspective* embodied in different texts, whether "true" or "false" in terms of their facts. In a recent defense of Fernão Mendes Pinto's writings, scholars have pointed out that even though he often presents information that is patently erroneous, he also presents a unique moral critique of Portuguese actions in Asia: his account hence cannot be ignored, or relegated to the dustbin of historiography.

This is also the point with our anonymous Malay writer, the Datu Bendahara. First, we note how his account – written in all probability in the eighteenth century – carefully distinguishes the Dutch from the Portuguese; not all Europeans are seen as identical in relation to Asians. That stereotype was to come in a later age. Second, we note his use of the classical myth of the animal's hide as a device for territorial aggrandizement (common to much of Asia, the Mediterranean and North Africa, and which already appears in the *Aeneid*) to characterize the Portuguese conquest. The implication appears to be that contracts between strangers, and the ambiguities inherent in the letter thereof, are often apt to be exploited by one or the other party; this *was* indeed the case at times in Portuguese relations with Asian rulers. Third, we note how the Malays are still portrayed as ultimately holding the balance between Dutch and Portuguese; it is only when the amok are sent in that the struggle between the two European powers is resolved. It is almost as if in a residual sense, the Malay writer wishes to assert that his community is still the most powerful (Andaya 1975). Fourth, we note that the Portuguese are presented largely as an Asian power, with their headquarters in Goa, a superscription of what the Portuguese eventually had become by the late seventeenth century on their character in an earlier period. And finally, we note that in the latter part of the text, a creeping admiration emerges in describing the Portuguese: the apparent wonder at the trouble taken by them to construct the stone fort at Melaka is one aspect, as is the admission that they were hard to defeat even if one fought them "for a whole year."

Thus, whatever its inaccuracies and quirks, the text that we have cited above is not devoid of interest for the historian of the period. It lies admittedly in the area between fiction (or rather folk-tale) and history, but so too did the average Portuguese primary school text of the mid-twentieth century whose illustrations might well portray a black warrior wearing a loincloth and carrying

a spear greeting Vasco da Gama on the beach at Calicut, or the oil-painting by José Veloso Salgado at Lisbon's Sociedade de Geografia (1898), which shows a wholly fantastic meeting between the superb Portuguese emissary and a suitably sinister Oriental potentate (meant to be the Samudri raja of Calicut). Separating myth from reality is of course a task that any historian must approach with trepidation, for while history is the stuff from which myth is made, myth-making too is an integral part of the historical process. With this word of caution then, we may embark on our journey, to consider and interpret the history of the Portuguese Asian empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.